



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 379

January Session, 2001

Substitute House Bill No. 6358

House of Representatives, April 19, 2001

The Committee on Human Services reported through REP. GERRATANA of the 23rd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT IMPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN THE STATE.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Subsection (a) of section 16a-41a of the general statutes is repealed
2 and the following is substituted in lieu thereof:

3 (a) The Commissioner of Social Services shall submit to the joint
4 standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of
5 energy planning and activities, appropriations, and human services the
6 following on the implementation of the block grant program
7 authorized under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of
8 1981, as amended:

9 (1) Not later than August first, annually, a Connecticut energy
10 assistance program annual plan which establishes guidelines for the
11 use of funds authorized under the Low-Income Home Energy
12 Assistance Act of 1981, as amended, and includes the following:

13 (A) Criteria for determining which households are to receive
14 emergency and weatherization assistance;

15 (B) A description of systems used to ensure referrals to other energy
16 assistance programs and the taking of simultaneous applications, as
17 required under section 16a-41;

18 (C) A description of outreach efforts; [and]

19 (D) Estimates of the total number of households eligible for
20 assistance under the program and the number of households in which
21 one or more elderly or physically disabled individuals eligible for
22 assistance reside;

23 (E) An application procedure that utilizes the most recent income
24 and asset calculation for the recipients of any program administered
25 by the Department of Social Services to determine the eligibility of an
26 individual or household for energy assistance, which application is
27 automatically transmitted by the Department of Social Services to the
28 energy assistance program with the permission of the applicant;

29 (F) An equitable total energy assistance benefit for all eligible
30 households that are responsible for payment of heating, electric or gas
31 utility bills, regardless of the source of heat or utility service, that
32 allows a household to designate a portion of its assistance to cover
33 secondary heating or utility expenses;

34 (G) A methodology for the prioritization of energy assistance
35 recipients for weatherization assistance funded by the United States
36 Department of Energy or the state, including a provision that such
37 weatherization assistance has a conservation education component,
38 providing the highest priority for weatherization assistance to the
39 lowest income households that have high energy consumption and
40 households containing a disabled individual or an individual over
41 sixty years or under six years of age;

42 (H) A description of efforts to coordinate energy and weatherization
43 assistance administered by the Department of Social Services pursuant
44 to section 17b-891 and any funds, services or programs available to
45 assist low-income households under the programs developed
46 pursuant to section 16-245m, arrearage forgiveness programs operated
47 by a gas company pursuant to section 16-262c or on a voluntary basis
48 by an electric or gas company, or assistance provided by private
49 sources such as fuel banks;

50 (I) A method for the operation of energy assistance on a year-round
51 basis;

52 (J) A targeting of energy assistance benefits to households based on
53 the total energy needs of the household, including provision of
54 assistance to resolve threatened or actual electric or gas utility
55 terminations of service, regardless of whether the utility service is the
56 source of heat;

57 (K) An evaluation of fuel and utility service purchasing
58 methodologies to reduce costs for fuel and utility service to low-
59 income households; and

60 (L) The use of energy assistance to leverage benefits for low-income
61 households, ensuring that necessary energy expenses are affordable on
62 a year-round basis;

63 (2) Not later than January thirtieth, annually, a report covering the
64 preceding months of the program year, including:

65 (A) In each community action agency geographic area and
66 Department of Social Services region, the number of fuel assistance
67 applications filed, approved and denied, the number of emergency
68 assistance requests made, approved and denied and the number of
69 households provided weatherization assistance;

70 (B) In each such area and district, the total amount of fuel,

71 emergency and weatherization assistance, itemized by such type of
72 assistance, and total expenditures to date; and

73 (C) For each state-wide office of each state agency administering the
74 program, each community action agency and each Department of
75 Social Services region, administrative expenses under the program, by
76 line item, and an estimate of outreach expenditures; and

77 (3) Not later than November first, annually, a report covering the
78 preceding twelve calendar months, including:

79 (A) In each community action agency geographic area and
80 Department of Social Services region, (i) seasonal totals for the
81 categories of data submitted under subdivision (1) of this subsection,
82 (ii) the number of households receiving fuel assistance in which elderly
83 or physically disabled individuals reside, and (iii) the average
84 combined benefit level of fuel, emergency and renter assistance;

85 (B) Types of weatherization assistance provided;

86 (C) Percentage of weatherization assistance provided to tenants;

87 (D) The number of homeowners and tenants whose heat or total
88 energy costs are not included in their rent receiving fuel and
89 emergency assistance under the program by benefit level;

90 (E) The number of homeowners and tenants whose heat is included
91 in their rent and who are receiving assistance, by benefit level; and

92 (F) The number of households receiving assistance, by energy type
93 and total expenditures for each energy type.

ET *JOINT FAVORABLE SUBST. C/R* *HS*
HS *JOINT FAVORABLE*

The following fiscal impact statement and bill analysis are prepared for the benefit of members of the General Assembly, solely for the purpose of information, summarization, and explanation, and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either House thereof for any purpose:

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: See Explanation Below

Affected Agencies: Department of Social Services

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation**State Impact:**

This bill adds additional components to the annual energy assistance allocation plan that the Department of Social Services must submit to the General Assembly. This plan establishes how the state distributes federal funding received under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act.

As the allocation plan only describes the manner in which federal funds are spent and does not actually determine the amount spent, the requirements added by this bill will not result in any additional expenditures. It should be noted, however, that the plan components required by the bill may change the current distribution of funds with regard to both the recipients and the types of assistance.

DSS may incur administrative costs in developing the additional components of the plan as required by the bill. It is expected that these costs can be absorbed within anticipated budgetary resources.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 6358*****AN ACT IMPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN THE STATE.*****SUMMARY:**

This bill expands the components the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner must include in his annual plan for using funds received under the federal energy assistance block grant program. By law, the commissioner must submit the plan to the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services committees by August 1 as part of a larger report. The committees can approve or modify the plan. The bill affects the 2002 and subsequent plans, as it is effective October 1, 2001.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2001

ENERGY ASSISTANCE PLAN COMPONENTS

The bill requires the DSS plan to include additional components, several of which reflect substantive policy changes from the plans submitted for legislative approval in recent years.

The plan must include a method for providing energy assistance on a year-round basis. The plan must also use energy assistance to leverage other benefits for low-income households to ensure that they can afford necessary energy expenses on a year-round basis.

The plan must include an application procedure for the energy assistance program that uses the most recent income and asset determination for recipients of other DSS programs to determine eligibility for the energy assistance program. DSS must automatically transmit applications for the other programs, with the beneficiary's consent, to the energy assistance program.

The plan must provide a benefit for all eligible households that are

responsible for paying heat, electric or gas bills that allows them to allocate part of their benefit to cover their secondary heat or utility sources. For example, if a household primarily heated with oil, but also used electric space heaters, the plan would have to allow the household to use part of its benefit for its electric bill.

The plan must target households based on their total energy needs, and must provide assistance to prevent threatened or actual terminations of utility service, whether or not the utility service is used for heating.

The plan must include a way of ranking energy assistance recipients for the separate weatherization assistance programs funded by the U.S. Department of Energy or the state. The highest priority for weatherization assistance must go to (1) the lowest income households that use large amounts of energy, (2) households with a disabled individual, and (3) households with members under six or over 60. This provision of the plan must include a conservation education component.

The plan must describe efforts to coordinate various energy assistance and weatherization programs and services. These are the programs administered by DSS, programs to help low-income people pay their electric bills, voluntary and state-mandated programs in which utilities forgive part of their customers' arrearages, and assistance provided by private sources such as fuel banks.

Finally, the plan must evaluate fuel and utility purchase methods to reduce their costs to low-income households.

BACKGROUND

Federal Energy Assistance Program

The federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Act provides the bulk of the funding for the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP). Under the most recently approved DSS plan, the federal funds are used to provide energy assistance during the heating season only. The plan does not include a secondary heat benefit or several provisions required by the bill.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Energy and Technology Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference

Yea 13 Nay 0

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Report

Yea 15 Nay 0